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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a talk about the functions of a small consultation group in a program at the University of Chicago for teaching employment counseling skills. The small consultation group has served as the home base of this training program. It is the only segment of the program that has met regularly at both the university and the local employment service office. It has been a natural go-between for the university staff and for the employment service staff. The paper discusses seven functions which the small consultation group fulfills in the training program: (1) discussion of classroom lectures; (2) consultation on counseling skills; (3) facilitation of personal growth; (4) study of group process; (5) exploration of how to develop an organization; (6) taking of field trips; and (7) sharing of information. In retrospect, one other function, having a good time in the process of work, was mentioned. The author concludes that her most important goal is for the experience to enlarge the trainee's vision of what is possible in handling and ultimately in creating his own life choices. (WS/Author)

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Functions of the Small Consultation Group in Teaching Employment Counseling Skills

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This morning I am going to talk about the functions of the small consultation group in our program at the University of Chicago. To discuss the role of these groups seems important because I think that they are the core or home base of the whole program.

There are many reasons to think that the small consultation group has served as the core or the home base of this training program. First of all, this group is the only segment of the program that has met regularly at both the University and the local employment service office. For this very bovious reason, the consultation group has been a natural go-between for the university staff and for the employment service staff.

Before I begin to tell you about the different functions of the small consultation group, let me tell you about the settings in which it meets. The small consultation group--consisting of five to seven trainees per group plus one consultant from the University staff--meets daily for one week out of every month during the residential university training; the rest of the month each group has one weekly meeting of an hour and a half in one of the local employment service offices. These groups also met for eight meetings during the summer break. About one-fourth to one-third of the meetings in the field have been used for field trips to various employment sites, training programs or related community services. These different settings in themselves have provoked different functions for the ongoing consultation group.

It is my hunch that the small consultation group has touched the trainee more thoroughly than either the university class or the employment service office; for this experience has encompassed the personal, the professional, and the intellectual. It is here that much of the translating from classroom theory to employment service application has

happened: It is here that various classroom lectures have been assimilated. It is here that the gaps between the intellectual input of the classroom and the experience of the trainee have been bridged. It is here that counseling theory has been translated into counseling skill. It is also here that understanding another person and being understood has become a personal, and sometimes a transforming, experience.

The small consultation group--in accord with client-centered counseling theory--accepts and listens to the trainee where he is at and, as a result, helps him move from there. The agenda of the consulation group begins with the immediate concerns, questions, ideas, and feelings of its trainees. As the trainee experiences the fact that his immediate feelings and thoughts are the stepping stones to the next stage of his own self understanding, he learns to understand and acknowledge his applicant's immediate concerns. Thus, he is more able to help the applicants acknowledge and deal effectively with their immediate concerns.

The fact that the trainees feel at home in the consultation group and know the agenda revolves around their immediate needs also has served to diversify the functions of the consultation group. There is a great deal of fluidity in the specific functions any one consultation group serves over time or on one particular day. The actual specific functions depends upon 1) the immediate needs of each trainee, 2) upon the goals of each member of the group, and 3) what is concurrently happening in the larger training group.

I am going to spend the major part of this talk describing specific functions the consultation group actually plays. I am sure you will

frequently notice how interrelated these functions are; so as I begin slicing the pie into separate slices, remember that these functions are varied, but never totally distinct.

The major functions of the consultation group have been:

1) discussion of classroom lectures,
2) consultation on counseling skills,
3) facilitation of personal growth,
4) study of group provess,
5) exploration of how to develop an organization,
6) taking of field trips, and
7) sharing of information.

1. Discussion of Classroom lectures

During the residential part of this training program, the consultation group meets for an hour and a half at the end of each day of instruction. Thus, it is very natural that any very stimulating lecture material or heated discussions from the classroom easily get carried over to the practicum situation. Also, if the trainees still have questions on this material, it frequently gets brought up and often resolved here. Some students always feel more comfortable asking what they consider a "dumb question" in a smaller group or on a one-to-one basis. The implications of new ideas are also sometimes spelled out here. Frequently, the students feel more comfortable in the consultation group discussing how to apply this material to the employment office situation. This is especially true if it was a lecturer unfamiliar with the employment office situation who presented the material. It is also clear that the

experiential input in the consultation group facilitates better learning at both the experiential and intellectual levels.

2. Consultation on Counseling Skills

The overarching goal of this program is to teach the trainees how to do employment counseling with the disadvantage applicant. The theory of counseling is taught in the classroom. The translation of that theory into counseling skill happens in the consultation group. That translation involves many steps, and those steps in turn are accomplished through several different activities which I will outline here.

Both the goals and methods of counseling should be taught in theory and in practice. In this program we first and most importantly teach the trainee how to listen to his applicant. Only then will he be able to find out what the applicant's goals are and be able to help the applicant work on those goals.

All of the ten consultants in this program have been trained in client-centered counseling theory; therefore, we all have a common basis of counseling methods and how to give consultation in learning those skills. As a result, I assume the consultations we give in counseling methods bear a great deal of similarity. The consultation we give in the specific goals of counseling or any other special area may differ more considerably.

I will describe the consultation we give in counseling methods first. In this practicum the trainee learns how to listen, empathically understand, and respond to his applicant's messages. The trainee prac-

tices his new way of responding during role playing in the consultation group. He also learns it by his consultant or other trainees modeling some of these understanding responses. He also learns it by reversing roles and playing the applicant, and experiencing the difference when his fellow trainee really understands him or misses the mark of what he is saying. Most importantly of all, the trainee continues to learn this new style of responding while on the job with his applicants and co-workers. In this first step the trainee learns to apply counseling theory by actually responding in this new understanding way.

The second step of consultation involves checking the trainee's application of this new understanding skill--checking it by himself, his peers, and his consultant to see to what extent he has applied this skill and how effective the results are. This is done by reflecting on those distinct episodes where the trainee was applying this new skill of understanding. This is done most precisely by listening to tape recordings of these episodes. From these recordings the trainee can learn: a) "Did I really hear what was being said?" b)"What was my response to what I heard?" c) "What was the applicant's response to what I then did?" and d) "How could I be more effective in the future?"

The third stage of consultation that I as an individual consultant do is to explore the area of goals in counseling. This involves increasing the trainee's awareness of what goals he intends to achieve in a specific counseling session; it also involves learning to help the applicant differentiate his own goals, and decide which goals he is going to work on in the counseling session. Then the trainee can decide if he is going to help the applicant plan specific tasks to meet those goals.

The consultation that goes with learning these skills is also a practice in goal-orientation for the trainee. These consultation periods are focused even more around the goals of the trainee. The consultant asks questions of the trainee such as: "What counseling problem do you want to focus on in this consultation? If we listen to a tape or recall of a counseling session, what issues do you want us to listen for and focus on? What concerns or issues are you working on right now as a counselor?" In this period, reflection on case material may become less random and more focused on specific or difficult spots for the individual trainee.

In this third stage more complex issues of counseling practice may come up. One issue that frequently arises is how to convey a necessary but difficult message to a client. For example, one incidentof my trainees had to deal with was an applicant who appeared to have an advanced case of veneral disease but who did not seem to realize it. Gently and caringly, my trainee was able to convey the message that the reasons for his extreme shakiness and "bad blood" was probably veneral disease. She was also able to convey the importance of his getting to a city health clinic for diagnosis and medical help; she also gave him all the information he needed to get to that clinic and the kind of help he could expect to get there. Several months later this applicant returned to my trainee beaming and in visibly better health to thank her for saving his health and now making it possible for him to get a job.

Another whole arena absolutely vital to consultation is dealing with the feelings the trainee has as he is engaged in the counseling

relationship. First of all, it is basic for a counselor to be in touch with his own subjective processes if he is to help other people get in touch with themselves. Secondly, it is important for the trainee to know what his feelings are as he works with an applicant so that he will know when there is a blockage in the session that is cominf from himself rather than the applicant. Thus, during consultation the trainee improves his counseling skill and also gets more in touch with his own subjective processes as he does so. At this instance in particular, doing consultation becomes a hybrid between teaching counseling skills and actually doing therapy.

A unique element in these small group consultation is the element of the group sharing of reactions and ideas to certain situations or certain applicant types. This sharing is particularly important in this program given the fact that it is the trainees and not the consultant who have work experience in the employment service.

3. Facilitation of Personal Growth

Personal growth seems to be quite abundant in this program. I think this is true because the interrelations of professional and personal growth are taken very seriously. The trainee is encouraged to explore his own subjective processes and to value this experiential data as the most important data of all for increasing his own self-understanding, his understanding of other people, and his effectiveness as a counselor. I think a great deal of the energy and zest displayed for this training by the trainees comes back to this fact---that they as persons are valued most highly in this program. The exploration of self is almost always relevant to the subject at hand in this program. If a trainee

is having a personal problem, and is willing to ask his consultation group's help in working on his problem, he almost invariably gets help. Norton Knopf and Regina Underwood are today presenting more information on personal growth in this program.

4. Study of Group Process

The consultation group has also served as an excellent laboratory for the study of group process. On numerous occasions we have frozen group process to refocus on what has just happened in the group--to understand from many levels and from the perspective of several different members of the group just exactly what was happening. The consultant group has also often discussed a frozen incident from the life of the larger group that for one reason or another they had not been able to understand or get feedback on at the original time. Often this "time out" from the group helps them effect a change in the process upon their re-entry to it. The trainees also used the small group for personal growth as they asked for and received personal, specific feedback on how they came across to other members.

5. Exploration of how to Develop an Organization

As the trainees have seen greater changes in themselves in one-to-one relationships, and in group relationships, they also have become more optimistic about the possibility of improvements in the way employment service staff relate to each other.

The first step in this organizational development has been the development of communication between trainees. They come to see how much consultation help they can provide each other when they do take the time to listen to each other's cases with the goal of understanding

and making suggestions without either taking over the direction of the case or evaluating the counselor who did handle it. Thus, supervision looses some of its formal, evaluative quality and can become a two-way helpful consultation. Having experienced this kind of consultation rather than evaluative supervision in this program, the trainees are likely to ask for or give consultation rather than contribute to a supervisory relationship that is extremely evaluative from above or paranoid from below. In other words, trainees are more likely to view supervisors, supervisees, or managers as persons one can share one's professional concerns with and effect change by relating to. As there becomes less fear in relating to supervisors and managers, there is greater possibility for full communication that is so necessary to effect improvements in work relationships and to eventually effect change in office procedure.

Some consultation groups and trainees are now inviting supervisors and managers to the consultation group to begin that fuller communication with them. For example, one trainee and her supervisor had a long standing conflict over just what was the trainee's job description. This supervisor came to the group and dialogued with her trainee; both of them came to a more satisfactory understanding of each and their job situation than they had ever had before. Both of them went away happier and with more flexibility for the trainee to conduct applicant groups in her office.

It helps the supervisors a great deal just to know what specifically has been happening in this program and, of course, it is even better for them to be a part of that change. I think it would be in-

credibily difficult for me if I were a supervisor who had my trainees returned to me after a two year training period and told only that they were now more qualified to do counseling. The supervisors also have concerns that need to be listened to, and the trainees are now in a position to better listen to these concerns as well.

6. Taking of Field Trips and 7. Sharing of Information

About one fourth to one third of the weekly meetings off-campus are devoted to taking field trips to various employment sites, training programs and related community services. Gathering and sharing new information on job descriptions and availability, training programs and community services is important homework for the employment interviewer or counselor so that he can make effective referrals on the job. Not only do we take field trips but also trainees often use group time to share information regarding excellent referral sources that they have found on their own.

These last two functions of the consultation group seem like play or almost frivolous after specifying the exact detail and depth of many of the other functions of the small group. It is true that field trips and information sharing are not as deep or psychological tasks as much of the other work of the consultation group; but that does not make them any less worthwhile! Some lightness and fun are leaven to the other work.

Lest you assume wrongly, the consultation group is <u>not</u> all work and no play. Part of relating to the trainees "where they are at" involves being ligt and gay or joking when that is exactly what the group feels like doing. I was delightfully surprised just last week when two of our best meetings arose out of group laughter that became almost hy-

sterical at one point. It was my strong feeling that the group needed to indulge in that laughter at that time--considering the heavy work that had been going on--they needed that in order to refresh themselves to become freely and personally involved in the group's work again. I think it is fair to say that all of us participants have had a good time in these groups at some time or another, if not as a baseline experience.

Conclusion

From this talk, I hope you now have some understanding as to how the small consultation group in this training program fulfills these seven functions. For review, these seven functions are:

1) discussion of classroom lectures
2) consultation on counseling skills
3) facilitation of personal growth
4) study of group process
5) exploration of how to develop an organization
6) taking of field trips, and
7) sharing of information.

In retrospect, I would like to name one other function which is to have a good time in the process of our work.

In conclusion, I ask myself what is the most important thing I want my trainees to get out of this program. I now find that question easy to answer. My answer is that I hope this experience and training will enlarge the trainee's total vision of what is possible--what is possible in helping an applicant, in improving a relationship with a

co-worker, a family member or a friend. Most importantly, I hope this experience can enlarge the trainee's vision of what is possible in handling and ultimately in creating his own life choices.